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PUBLISHED BY THE FRIENDS OF THE EVERGLADES

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## **THE PROBLEM & THE PLAN**

The supply of clean, fresh water from the central Kissimmee-Okeechoohee-Everglades Basin is no longer adequate to supply all the needs of South Florida. The water itself is threatened by increasing pollution from human, animal, agricultural and toxic wastes. The largest coalition ever formed in the State of Florida proposes the plan found in this brochure as a solution to this serious problem and threat to all life.

In its pristine condition, the Everglades waterway arose in the lakes of the upper Kissimmee basin and flowed south via the meandering lower Kissimmee River to Lake Okeechobee. In wet years, the lake overspilled its southern rim into the Sawgrass Everglades contributing to the shallow surface sheet flow accruing there from direct rainfall. Water slowly flowed southwestward over the Everglades marshes in the form of a very broad river as much as eight feet deep at summer flood, eventually emptying into Florida Bay.

As a result of drainage works, built over the last 90 years, the Everglades today is only one-half its original size and water levels in the remaining Glades have been lowered significantly. In the north, a canal now cuts through the old meanders of the Kissimmee River and sends drainage waters rapidly and erratically to Lake Okeechobee. In the south, freshwater is lost through canals which dump it into the salt tides. In turn, the saltwater invades the drained islands.

The resulting loss of marsh habitat has severely depleted wildlife. Pollution and interruptions of water flow have diminished freshwater and marine fisheries. Instead of the gradual sheet flow upon which estuarine fisheries depend for nourishment and maintenance of vital salinity patterns, canals now deliver destructive sharp pulses of fresh waters increasingly polluted by agricultural and urban runoff. As canals lower the water table, the organic soils dry, oxidize, blow away and burn to bedrock.

The plan for the effective repair of the damaged Everglades system is to restore and purify the sheet flow from the Kissimmee Lakes to Florida Bay. This includes: resolving the pollution problems of Lake Tohopekaliga, Taylor Creek, Nubbin Slough, the Everglades agricultural area, and Lake Okeechobee; refluating Lakes Cypress, Hatchineha, and Kissimmee to the greatest possible extent; dechannelizing the lower Kissimmee River and restoring Paradise Run; restoring sheet flow in the Holey Land and Rotenberger Tracts, Conservation Area Three, and Everglades National Park; reestablishing sheet flow connections between Area Three and the Big Cypress Preserve to the west and the Shark River Slough to the south; refilling that portion of Canal 111 which lies under U.S. Highway 1 and the existing portions of Canals 109 and 110; restoring the Turner River in the Big Cypress Fresh Water Preserve; and, plugging the Buttonwood Canal in Everglades National Park as authorized and funded by Congress.

The Florida Legislature has correctly foreseen the need to repair the Everglades system by authorizing the dechannelization of the lower Kissimmee River. By its Act of 1976, the Legislature anticipated that restoration of the lower Kissimmee River would enhance water conservation, ground water supplies, wetland vegetation, energy conservation, conversion of nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) to peat and muck, low energy ranching, fresh water fisheries, and wildlife. Restoration of the lower Kissimmee River together with refluctuation of Lakes Hatchineha, Cypress, and Kissimmee would in addition provide the start of a long slow flow of the water in the system - water which could pass through Lake Okeechobee into the Miami Canal and thence as sheet flow into the Holey Land and Rotenberger Tracts.

The opportunity for the State of Florida to dechannelize the lower Kissimmee will not remain long as an option in the repair of the Everglades system. Removal of spoil from the levees adjacent to the existing canal continues, and land in the former flood plain is being sold and developed. Flood plain development would introduce new pollutants into the existing canal for rapid transport into Lake Okeechobee.

Those organizations who support this petition - aware that the option of restoring the lower Kissimmee can be foreclosed - ask the appropriate agencies and officials of Florida to take immediate action to prevent such foreclosure by:

- imposing a moratorium on the further removal of spoil from the area and further developments in the flood plain
- commencing the purchases of all lands in the former flood plain which are not now in State ownership
- petitioning the Congress and President of the United States to direct the dechannelization of the lower Kissimmee by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- directing the relevant agencies of State government to proceed with dechannelization of the lower Kissimmee and refluctuation of Kissimmee Valley lakes.

The purpose of this petition is to achieve environmental benefits accruing from repair of the Everglades system. Water quality in the surface waters of the Everglades system will improve. Restored sheet flow will enable the removal of nutrients from those waters by converting them into the tissues of wetland plants and subsequently storing them in valuable peat and muck soils.

Reducing nutrient enrichment of surface waters is essential to the Everglades system but it is not the only goal to be achieved by repair of the system. Also of paramount importance is the regeneration of peat and muck, of fresh and saltwater fisheries, of wildlife, and of Everglades National Park. Florida's stance on nutrient pollution - as for example in Lake Okeechobee - should not simply center on how much enrichment the Lake can tolerate but rather on means through which we can convert some of those nutrients into vital environmental products. Rather than continuing to risk the accumulation of waste materials in the Lake, we should be moving to derive valuable resources from them.

There will be benefits to fresh and saltwater fisheries, to wildlife, and to water quality. These translate into increased public health and improved recreational experience, protein foods for Floridians and their visitors, and profit for the tourist industry and fisheries, both recreational and

commercial. There will also be benefits - little recognized - arising from increase energy efficiency.

Management of water in the Everglades, as established over many decades, has converted it from the solar driven system it was to a highly intensive fossil-fuel system. This exchange drastically displaces the solar-driven processes which produce wetland vegetation, peat and muck, potable water, fish, and wildlife. The prime means through which solar energy activated the system to produce those essential resources was sheet flow - an essential function which has largely been lost. It is only necessary to reestablish sheet flow to regain solar energy products from the Everglades.

The goals of this coalition are entirely in accord with the expanded environmental responsibilities given to all water management districts by the 1972 Water Resources Act and to the South Florida Water Management District by the Kissimmee River Restoration Act of 1976.

## **THE COALITION**

We petition all appropriate officials and agencies of government to begin repair of the Everglades system.

### **STATE-WIDE**

- Friends of the Everglades
- League of Women Voters of Florida
- Florida Audubon Society
- Florida Chapter, The Sierra Club
- Florida Wildlife Federation
- Florida Division, Izaak Walton League
- Florida League of Anglers
- Everglades Protection Association
- Florida Conservation Foundation
- Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida
- Florida Federation of Garden Clubs
- Organized Fishermen of Florida
- Defenders of the Environment
- South Florida Coalition of Conservation, Civic and Sports Clubs
- Kissimmee River Restoration Coalition

### **LOCAL**

- Tropical Audubon Society
- Audubon Society of the Everglades
- Broward County Audubon Society
- Halifax River Audubon Society
- Royal Palm Audubon Society
- Environmental Coalition of Broward County

- Dade County Federation of Women's Clubs
- Hollywood Branch, American Association of University Women
- Environmental Council of Volusia County
- Miami Business & Professional Women's Club
- Dade County Council of Garden Club Presidents
- Coral Gables Woman's Club
- Rotary Club of Coconut Grove
- Coalition of Issue Caucuses P.A.C.
- Caloosa Bird Club
- Conservation Alliance of St. Lucie County
- West Palm Beach Garden Club
- Allamanda Circle
- Amaryllis Circle
- Azalea Circle
- Oleander Circle
- Poinsettia Circle
- Coconut Grove Garden Club
- Miami Beach Garden Club
- Lemon Bay Garden Club
- Golden Gate Garden Club
- Ken-Pines Garden Club
- Shenandoah Garden Club
- West Miami Garden Club
- Green Thumb Garden Club
- Miami Shores Garden Club
- Periwinkle Garden Club
- St. John Lutheran Church
- Women Sunset Park Garden Club
- Kendall Garden Club
- Landscape Garden Club
- Hammock Garden Club
- Saga Bay Garden Club
- Norwood Garden Club
- Sunset Garden Club
- Concerned Democrats of North Dade County
- Everglades Search & Rescue
- Sierra Club, Calusa Group
- Sierra Club, Miami Group
- Broward County Airboat & Halftrack Conservation Club
- Park Gardens Condominium Association
- Florida Keys Chapter, Izaak Walton League
- Stuart Chapter, Izaak Walton League
- Palm Beach County Archaeological Society

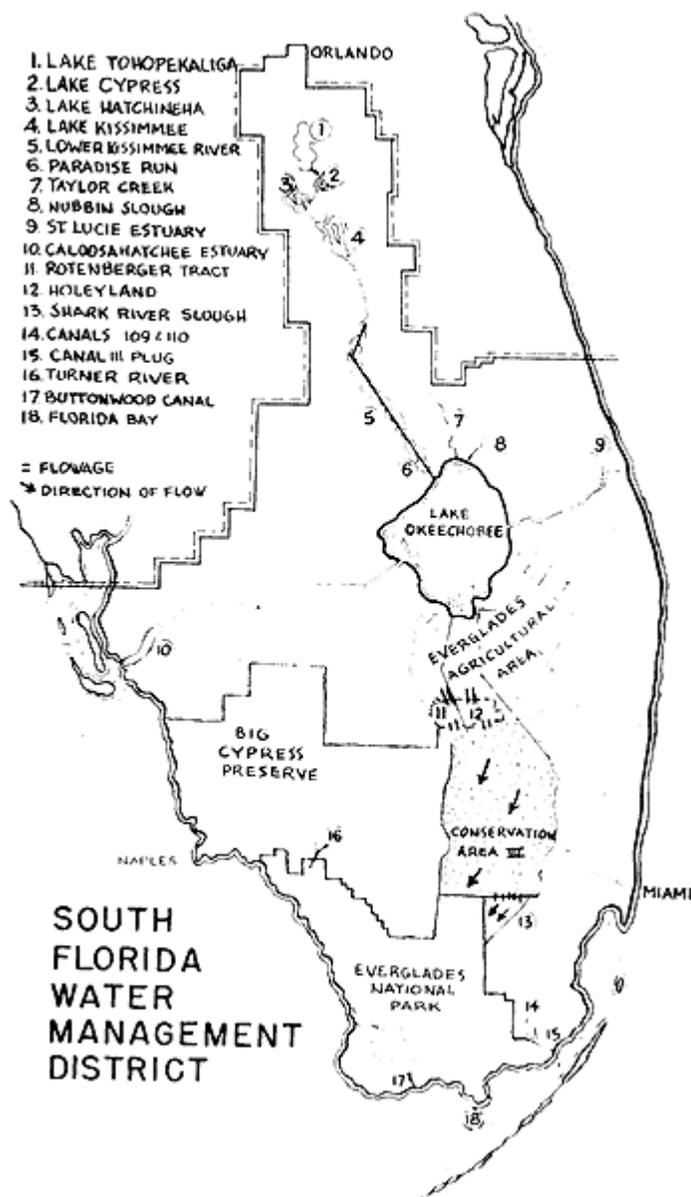
## **MUNICIPALITIES**

- City of Boca Raton
- City of Boynton Beach
- City of Delray Beach
- City of Miami Beach

## COUNTIES

- Monroe County Commission
- Dade County Commission (1976)

## COSTS OF DECHANNELIZATION



According to figures obtained from the South Florida Water Management District, as well as private engineering firms, indications are that one-hundred percent spoil removal for complete dechannelization of the lower Kissimmee River would cost \$16 million.

Much of the spoil has been sold and removed; therefore some portions of the channel would remain as lakes.

According to figures of the SFWMD there are 41,470 acres in the original flood plain. Of this amount 14,060 acres are in public ownership, and 27,410 acres belong to the private sector. Because of periodic inundation of the flood plain, it would be necessary to purchase those lands not in public ownership. Based on an average of \$600 per acre, it is estimated that the purchase of the flood plain would amount to \$16,446,000.

### TOTAL DECHANNELIZATION:

Spoil removal	\$16,000,000
Flood plain acquisition	16,446,000
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\$32,446,000

"Cost? oh my dear girl, the cost wouldn't be so great as the expense of allowing an increase of pollution in our fresh water. The costs of not doing it are monumental."

- Marjory Stoneman Douglas  
in an interview by Georgia  
Tasker, *Miami Herald*, March  
8, 1981

It is with a strong sense of urgency that Florida Audubon Society requests all appropriate State and Federal officials and agencies to adopt and implement policies for the repair of the badly damaged Kissimmee/Lake Okeechobee/Everglades system.

At the heart of any such repair (or even lessening of the rate at which the system is degrading) is restoration of the lower Kissimmee River through dechannelization. It is late in the 11th hour for this restoration measure. Unless the state moves vigorously and promptly, removal of spoil from the levees, land sales, and development in the flood plain will foreclose this vital measure. And, the flood plain development will inject massive new pollution into canal C-38 for rapid transport to the already strained Lake Okeechobee.

By emphasizing the timely urgency of the Kissimmee dechannelization, we do **not** imply the other measures are less important. An integrated system such as the Kissimmee/Okeechobee/Everglades requires multiple thoughtful, integrated action. It is not possible to "do only one thing" ... and have any hope of restoring a **system**.

*Adopted by the Board of Directors, April 11, 1931*

The unique features of Florida Bay offer angling experiences not known to exist anywhere else in the world.

Florida Bay makes up one-fourth of Everglades National Park. And at least two-thirds of this Park is a sea and coastal marine ecosystem influencing marine life throughout Florida's coast.

This marine ecosystem lies at the downstream end of the Everglades watershed and is dependent on the quantity and quality of fresh water supplied by natural events taking place in the northern

reaches of the Everglades, Lake Okeechobee and the Kissimmee River Basin.

By reestablishing meandering rivers and surface water sheetflow, nature will again be responsible for the protection and rebuilding of the vast marine resources that made and make Florida Bay unique in all the world.

*Everglades Protection Association, Inc.*

We support dechannelization of the lower Kissimmee River. Dechannelization is a commitment to water quality and quantity for both the populace and environment of south Florida. Nothing short of dechannelizing C-38 will stem low land development in the lower Kissimmee River Basin. With development, the state's options for restoration of water quality, flood retention capacity and wildlife habitat, diminish rapidly while political pressure for "flood control" and channelization will increase exponentially.

Therefore, we support dechannelization as the most economically reasonable and pragmatic management technique which will assure increased water quality, flood capacity, and wildlife habitat.

*Florida Chapter, The Sierra Club and Kissimmee River Restoration Coalition*

The channelization of the Kissimmee is an outstanding example of the frontier-hangover belief that natural areas are worthless unless used to produce products directly measurable in dollar values. Although we now know better, we still don't put dollar signs on good health, or clean water, or non-consumable plants and animals that are components of natural systems. It's only after all these good things are lost and we have to pay millions for substitute hardware and medicines that we come to realize that nature's free gifts were priceless, not worthless.

*Florida Conservation Foundation (ENFO)*

Implementation of this plan will ensure protection of humanity's greatest need for survival - good drinking water.

*Florida Division. Isaac Walton League*

It's about time we fixed the Everglades to save our water, our wildlife, our energy supplies, and ourselves.

*Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida*

We urge total backfilling of the Kissimmee River and restoration of sheet flow through the Everglades - measures vital for the production of seafood and gamefish.

*Florida League of Anglers*

The Everglades Lake Okeechobee, and Florida Bay are in trouble. We must restore historic water regimes as much as practical. An imperative first step is an immediate moratorium on flood plain development and removal of spoil material.

*Florida Defenders of the Environment*

We are disturbed with the degradation and loss of natural resources of the Everglades system - water, wildlife, freshwater and marine fisheries, and muck. We strongly support this proposal to repair the Everglades system.

*Florida Wildlife Federation*

## **THE GREAT VALLEY**

I sat upon my horse and looked from north to south on the west bank of the Kissimmee River, knowing that soon I, more than anyone else, would have the pleasures of knowing the good, the bad, and the beauty of this valley as it existed in those days.

For eight years I had the pleasure of working, gathering, and grazing cattle in this great valley, which was soon to be changed. The areas I knew were "Kisso" to the north, "Micco Bluff" to the south, and Fort Kissimmee in the center.

Once a year we would join our neighbors and gather our stray cattle which had crossed the River to Duck Slough or had stopped mid-way on the Grassy Islands within the river. The cattle would be fat and the calves were always real good. We swam our horses from island to island until all cattle were retrieved and driven back home. We looked forward to this great venture each year.

The river, swollen by summer rains, would flood the original valley and then take the excess waters to Lake Okeechobee for storage and use during the dry months. This skeet flow of water brought new life to the valley by destroying the unwanted vegetation and restoring fresh grasses and new growth for the coming winter. This was nature's way for providing a suitable place for birds, wildlife, and even man, to thrive.

The Kissimmee Valley was fantastic country. It is hard for me to understand how man could have the audacity to think he could improve on the Kissimmee River and Valley by cutting the heart out of the river and replacing it with a canal.

- Bubba Mills, Hendry County rancher

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